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ABSTRACT

Taking the view that job sharing is a positive alternative for workers and employers, this article defines job sharing in broad terms and describes its evolution from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to the present. The advantages, such as increased productivity, are felt to be impressive, but disadvantages also exist, including significant cost increases to employers and lack of support from management, unions, and the federal government. However, federal and state interest is increasing, especially because of the high unemployment problem and current recession. California's Work Sharing Unemployment Insurance program, which allows payment of partial benefits to work sharers, has resulted in more people working and less money being expended for unemployment compensation. Other experimental programs have been successfully implemented in the public and private sectors. As employers become the initiating force behind job sharing, it will become firmly established in both male and female occupations. Problems to be worked out before that occurs include consideration of salary advancement and career promotion, greater attention given to accurate job descriptions and performance evaluation, and identification of the kinds of jobs that can be shared. (Author/WD)

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JOB SHARING
AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

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INTRODUCTION

Innovative ideas concerning the structure of work gain acceptance slowly. "Reduction of working hours, with accompanying pay cuts, during periods of economic downturn, is a practice as old as the industrial era."[1] Work sharing, part-time employment are ideas that have been around, in different forms, for many years. It is now claimed that the job sharing concept"...could touch off almost the biggest boon to industry productivity since the invention of the computer or could become the wave of the future even a tidal wave."[2] If this is true job sharing may be the most important personnel issue employers will encounter in the coming decade.

SCOPE

The prospects for job sharing are bright. Discussion and understanding of the issue is important. It is my intent, first, to define the terms often randomly and interchangeably used (job sharing, work sharing, job splitting, twinning, leisure sharing, job pairing, part-time employment, tandem employment) and then once the concept of job sharing is firmly established briefly look at the history of this idea and the reasons it is now gaining popularity. Using contemporary models the advantages and disadvantages of job sharing will be listed. Work sharing and part-time employment will be fully discussed to allow comparison with and better understanding of the main issue, job sharing. An overview of major modern job sharing experiments will be presented with special emphasis given to its use in the public sector. Finally future trends in job sharing will be examined concluding with the prospects for job sharing to accomplish a reformation of the workplace.

CONTENT

There is currently little agreement or standardization of terminology in this field even among those actually sharing jobs or carrying on model programs. The blanket term part-time employment has been used to cover work sharing during depressed economies as well as all less than forty hours per week work. Current usage is demanding a division into more precise concepts. Barney Olsted, Director of New Ways to Work, defines job sharing as "a voluntary work arrangement in which two people hold responsibility for what was formerly one full-time position. Salary and fringe benefits are prorated according to time worked."[3]

Work sharing is the restructuring of full-time positions but it is often not voluntary. Employers may avert layoffs by reducing all employees work hours. Job sharing, a career level opportunity, should not be confused with work sharing, a temporary work adjustment. "The concept of work sharing involves the temporary apportionment of existing work so that employees may be retained during an economic downturn."[4]

Job sharing is sometimes further confused when terms such as job pairing or job splitting are used. Simply put "job pairing occurs when there is no clear-cut division of duties and responsibilities; job pairers jointly assume the entire workload...job splitting refers to the restructuring of a full-time position so that two part-time positions requiring employees with differing levels of ability are created."[5]

The many terms that have developed simply reflect the fact that the normal (so called) forty hour work week may be redefined in many ways, for many reasons. The basic factors in job sharing should be restated. A) Voluntary - job sharing

is a chosen alternative to the normal work pattern. B) Partner-work divided into segments is just part-time work. A partner affirms the fact that the position is seen as having the status of a normal full time slot. In fact a similar criterion for job sharing is that the deliberate conversion of a full-time position take place. Rather than being this specific I believe the shared position should be viewed as a career position, an important part of the organization. Job sharing is not part-time work. It is a professional, technical, career position as distinguished from the traditionally low status of part-time work. C) Fringe Benefits - a provision for full or prorated fringe benefits reaffirms the fact that job sharing is respected by the organization, it is a commitment to the fact that workers who spend less than forty hours do play an important role. In fact in many cases employers are providing full benefits the belief being that the good will and commitment to the company this generates more than offsets any additional costs.

Job sharing is a modern development coming out of a long history of shared work. "It is important to recognize that industrial societies have consistently applied policies to reduce and ration worktime as a means of combating joblessness."[6] As this statement indicates the current drive for acceptance of professional/technical/career job sharers is based on a foundation of blue collar work sharers who were working less hours to avoid layoffs.

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was passed during the Great Depression to spread employment by defining the standard workweek as forty hours and requiring overtime premium wages be paid for work above that figure. The 'normal', 'standard' forty hour workweek was born. Employees and employers are beginning to question the sanctity of this 'standard' workweek. It was set by statute and may

undergo changes the same way. Unions are attempting to reduce the workweek, through legislation, to thirty five hours. Why is there such a pervasive feeling that less than forty hours per week workers are substandard? This underlying feeling is based on the fact that in the past part-time workers were mainly used in the lowest available slots and were often women. Women carried a stigma of less than total job commitment for it was widely felt that their real role and work was in the home. This belief seems to be slowly changing.

Voluntary part-time workers have tripled since 1954.[7] Society's view of employment and the demands it is making on the workplace, has initiated fundamental changes in work patterns. The reasons for this trend begins with the fact that we are becoming a more highly educated population. A new worker is evident who will not settle for part-time work but rather wishes the job satisfaction and financial rewards of a shared career position.

Since the mid 1950's the increase in the average annual growth of part-time workers has more than doubled the rate of increase for full-time workers.[8] What factors contributed to this statistic? There are three groups - women, students and retirees-that are most visibly accountable. Women hold the greatest proportion of part-time work. America is becoming a two paycheck society with many of those second checks part-time work. American women are still handling most family duties and due to this responsibility are often found working outside the home less than full-time.

The second major group is students. "Many youths begin their working lives as voluntary part-time workers while still enrolled in school. The entrance into the labor force of the post-World War II 'baby boom'... has

had a profound effect on part-time employment."[9] This group of under 25 years old accounts for 45% of the growth in part-time employment.[10] The baby boom and its effect on employment is tapering off yet these individuals have experienced an alternative form of work and are placing demands on employers for flexibility in the workplace.

The third major group, increasingly taking part-time employment, is retirees. In this group may be included handicapped people of all ages who for health reasons wish to limit the number of hours they work. There has been a noticeable trend towards earlier retirement with many of these individuals wishing to do limited work while enjoying the advantages of increased leisure time. Higher and higher levels of earned income are allowed without jeopardizing social security benefits. When this is taken into account it seems clear that retirees will naturally lobby for the increased availability of part-time work. The advantages to both the employer and retiree seem strong enough to alter traditional patterns.[11]

Finally mention should be made of the growth of service industries in our economy. This sector has always employed a high proportion of voluntary part-time workers and the feeling is that this trend will likely increase in the future. The public's demand for services at a greater range of hours (nights, weekends) combined with a willing labor pool to fill these slots should speed the trend toward less than full-time employment.[12]

The growth of employment in less than full-time positions is a major work trend that is due fundamentally to supply and demand. On the supply side there has emerged a large group seeking employment part-time. On the demand side service industries have rapidly expanded creating a need for part-time workers.

This summary, by using the term 'part-time' employment, emphasizes the point that "the higher the job skills and the degree of supervisory responsibilities, the less likely is a worker to be employed on a part-time basis."[13] The idea of job sharing wishes to expand this documented trend of low level part-time work into all areas of employment particularly skilled positions. There is evidence of deep rooted feelings supporting this change in work patterns. There is a "revolt against oppressive, meaningless and alienating work...the work force, in particular the younger members, are better educated and are entering the work world with higher expectations about work and their role in it...the new worker seemed to be adopting a new value system that deemphasized money and focuses on the ability to learn, to develop one's potential and to gain control over one's work."[14] We are seeing a rebellion against traditional work patterns, a movement that may lend support to job sharing.

The advantages of job sharing should clearly present the case as to why the new worker wishes to have this option available. The disadvantages may indicate why, other than normal resistance to change, this new type of position is taking so long in getting widely established.

The advantages to the job sharer and to the employer are impressive. Flexibility may be the key word. Sharers may be scheduled when they are most needed and they are built in substitutes for one another thus eliminating the costs of sick and vacation leave replacements. Experienced older employers are able to be retained, their knowledge not totally lost by retirement. Case studies indicate absenteeism and turnover rates decrease under job sharing arrangements. Medical appointments, sick leave due to children or need for personal time are expenses normally borne by the organization. These types of absenteeism are not prevalent

with job sharers for the primary factor, increased leisure time, allows the employee the opportunity to handle their personal life on their own time. Having more leisure time reduces fatigue, increases morale and increases on the job energy level. These factors result in the job sharer being more productive than his full-time counterpart. Boredom, lack of commitment and burnout are all problems solved by job sharing.

Sharing a position, hiring two people, gives the employer an enlarged pool of talent from which to select. There are many talented, educated, excellent employees who for a variety of reasons do not wish to work full-time. A company that employs job sharers is at an advantage in that employment market. The employer is in a position to hire individuals with complimentary skills thus allowing the combination to be greater than its component parts. Having two workers may cut training expenses since the partner of any departing job sharer will be present to instruct the new replacement. Continuity will be an obvious advantage the organization will realize.

Job sharers seem to have the effect of stimulating one another. They feel committed to work as a unit, to share ideas, to help each other, to catch mistakes. Clearly an employer has much to gain from combined positions. Overtime might be another area of savings resulting from the use of job sharers. Any extra work could be given to a job sharer at a standard wage rate. A final advantage is that the increased number of positions opened through the sharing of work allows greater opportunities for affirmative action hiring.[15]

The list of advantages is impressive yet would be realized in a measureable form only after implementation. The disadvantages are real and may be computed

immediately. Employers will incur additional costs from the start.[16] "Statutory benefits such as social security (FICA) and state taxes for unemployment cannot be prorated."[17] "In addition, employers can be forced to pay job sharers full compensatory and supplementary benefits due to collective bargaining agreements."[18] Administrative costs could increase due to the larger number of employees and training costs could rise if each job sharer started and was trained separately.

Management has long believed in the one person, one job concept. What happens to accountability if a particular position is shared by two individuals? It seems internal communication could be seriously damaged under a job sharing arrangement. Scheduling meetings when everyone could attend could present a problem. Shared jobs could double the problems their supervisor would encounter, could balloon span of control to the point of ineffectiveness.

Unions are reserving judgement on job sharing but their first inclination was to perceive it as threatening. Employers would take advantage of workers and in effect use job sharing to implement speedups of work. There is some truth to the feeling employers might take advantage of the situation. Job sharers do receive fewer promotions and may not benefit from cost-of-living and pay increases on par with full-time workers. The diminished salary combined with limited career outlook and difficulty in obtaining supervisory level positions will initially keep many away from job sharing.

Even our federal governments regulations are structured in such a manner as to discourage job sharing. Present federal regulations and collective bargaining agreements often make it in the employers interest to resort to layoffs

instead of some form of job or work sharing. There are few, if any, costs associated with workers on layoffs while work sharing involves major expenditures in fringe benefits along.[19] "Another major roadblock to work sharing is the unemployment insurance system, which may actually lead workers and their unions to accept layoffs as opposed to reduced work hours. Workers whose hours are cut receive no compensation from the State (except in California), unless their earnings fall below the level of benefits to which they would be entitled in a layoff."[20]

The battle lines are drawn. Does the increased productivity (advantages) outweigh the increased expenses (disadvantage)? The government agencies, school systems and private sector firms that have experimented in job sharing should now be discussed to see how the advantages and disadvantages have developed in the real world.

> "Most articles promoting job sharing are written by those who share jobs and by those whose employees share jobs. Articles condemning job sharing usually are written by employers of part-time workers employed at part-time jobs. The distinction is important. Part-time work conjures up images of unskilled, unmotivated workers and this is not what job sharing is about. Job sharers have the same skills, education and motivation as full-time workers; they simply do not want to work so much."[21]

We have looked at part-time work to provide us with the necessary background. We now want to separate job sharing so it may be evaluated on its own merits. It is important to realize the differences between the two for only when the distinctions are understood will job sharing have a chance to succeed.

The leader in the area of job sharing has been the public sector with the federal government playing a major role. The federal government is a gigantic employer and it is only fitting that it has been called upon to take the lead. Through demonstration projects information will be gathered and then disseminated

to the private sector. Former President Carter is on record as stating:

> "I will encourage-actively and agressively- the adoption in the Federal government and in private business sector, of flexible working hours for men and women, and I will take action to increase the availability of part-time jobs, with proper provision for fringe benefits and job security."[22]

The most important piece of legislation is the Federal Employees Part-time Career Employment Act of 1978. The legislation defines part-time work as being between 16-32 hours per week and this statute is in response to and specks of "the productive potential of older workers, handicapped, students and parents unused because of standard working hours."[23] It should be made clear that the title of this piece of legislation is a misnomer. Job sharing (not part-time employment) is now the law of the land, has official status, is recognized as important and workable. The law requires each federal agency to identify job sharing positions, to develop hiring goals and objectives and to make progress reports to OPM. We are seeing undone barriers in the federal government that hampered job sharing especially in supervisory positions.

On the state level momentum is also building. New York, Massachusetts, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, Minnesota, Wisconsin have all passed legislation, most often job sharing demonstration projects. California is the leader among all the states so it will be used to indicate what is occurring at the state level.

State efforts began in the mid 1970's with twenty states now having some form of alternative work schedule. In 1977 the Part Time Employment Program was initiated in the California State Department of Motor Vehicles, the intent being to "test the creation of part time opportunities and its expansion to other agencies."[24] California's most unique project is the Work Sharing Unemployment Insurance program. Our present unemployment insurance system actually encourages

layoffs for no assistance is given to work sharers who go on reduced hours. California has passed legislation that allows payment of partial benefits to work sharers. Many European countries have similiar plans with the German program most closely paralleling the one in California. The intent of all such programs is to provide a temporary solution to layoffs. In California more people have been kept working and as a secondary benefit less money has been expended for unemployment checks.

It is obvious that it is difficult to neatly divide the discussion of job sharing from the issues of work sharing and part-time employment. It is important to understand work sharing for in our present economy it may be work sharing not job sharing that first gains the greater acceptance. "Employers like it because it saves the cost of rehiring and retraining workers when production rebounds and employees appreciate the fact that they not only retain their jobs and fringe benefits but partly recoup lost wages."[26]

California's work sharing program is intended only as a temporary solution to unemployment, no company is allowed to participate for more than 20 weeks within a 52 week period. The savings to California have been impressive yet strong critics exist. The AFL-CIO sees work sharing as being a threat to the seniority system it has fought hard to develop. Also the threat of an employer speeding up production in the shorter week, thus taking advantage of the situation, is feared. "The National Association of Manufacturers opposes work sharing on the grounds that it subsidizes inefficient companies by providing their employees with funds paid by healthy companies."[27] Opponents of work sharing may be over shadowed by changes necessitated by high unemployment. Serious attention to work sharing as a temporary solution to unemployment may occur following the lead of many European countries.

Teaching has been the most active occupation involved in the study of and

experimentation with job sharing. In 1967 the Catalyst organization assessed partnership teaching in Boston. It was discovered that parents, teachers and school administrators all spoke well of and seemed to feel they benefited from the arrangement. More work was accomplished, more individual attention was given, student performance improved all due to the use of teaching partners.

New Ways to Work, in 1976, published a study of job sharing in the San Francisco Bay area school districts. As might be expected issues such as division of responsibilities, time schedules and classroom philosophy did arise. Administration also discovered procedural issues that needed clarification. These involved such things as application procedures, reverting to full time status procedures and guidelines for salary advancement. Overall approval was found. Once again "Parents tended to approve of job sharing with the majority of respondents to an informal survey indicating that they believed 'the children definitely benefited from the program'."[28]

The most comprehensive study of job sharing was undertaken by Gretl Meier, a member of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Teacher job sharers held the largest percentage of any responding group (26%) although administrator/coordinators/program developers were a close second(25%). Social workers, secretaries, researchers and a great variety of other occupations rounded out the study. A summary of the study's findings indicates that the typical job sharer is less than forty, white, previously held a full-time position and is most commonly found in a non-profit, often small, organization.

These workers typically had moderate to high contact with the public, a good percentage (30%) had supervisory authority. Team salaries were on the whole low to moderate with most members reporting they did receive cost-of-living increases,

merit raises and some type of fringe benefits package. Communication between partners was felt to be essential with the whole litany of job sharing advantages (increased energy, morale, productivity...) proclaimed by the vast majority. Drawbacks that were cited were centered mainly on difficulty in promotion, tenure and actually restricting one's working hours to half time. From the job sharers point of view this is a demanding work option that they enjoy and feel is of great benefit to their employer as well as themselves. In 1978 Hawaii instituted a three year job sharing program within the Department of Education. The stated objectives included offering alternative employment options to teachers, provide opportunities for the great number of unemployed teachers in the State and to provide educational stimulus for students. This study lead to the identification of several practical job sharing problems. Increases in staff size could affect the availability of supplies and equipment, could make scheduled meeting difficult for all to attend and could increase administrative costs. Even so the number of advantages, all previously listed, were felt to easily outweigh the problems encountered. "Cost-conscious administrators pointed out that they consistently got more than their money's worth from the sharers. 'We got about two-thirds of a teacher for roughly half-time pay"... many anticipated problems (weak communication among teachers, poor follow-through on discipline cases, lack of job commitment) simply did not materialize."[29]

It might be useful to take a quick look at job sharing in private industry. "Large corporations such as Xerox, Connecticut General Life Insurance and Eastman Kodak not only have opened their doors to permanent part-timers but also are considering them as high priority employees."[30] While the public sector is the biggest innovator in this field many companies are succumbing to the advantages of

job sharing. Half of Sears' 395,000 employees work less than thirty hours, ninety percent of McDonald's 250,000 employees do the same. Most of these positions are not skilled and the main reason they are hired is to solve scheduling programs but even so, it is an indication of a dramatic change in our workforce. Upjohn, Hartford's Travelers Insurance Company, Control Data all are tapping a supply of labor that is paying off in profits.

CONCLUSION

"The examination of recent experiments and experiences with alternative work patterns suggests policy issues for future consideration. That the issues are becoming defined is, in itself, progress toward changing work patterns."[32] Much of personnel policy is standard operating procedures, is a convenient usually unquestioned way of doing business. The experimentation, the questioning may well be the start of a reevaluation of attitudes toward less than full time work. The leadership has so far been provided by women's organizations with a much broader coalition of backers now forming.

What does the future hold for job sharing? The future should certainly see more men, male dominated professions and more supervisory positions come into job sharing. Problems with salary advancement and career promotion will have to be addressed before the diversification will occur. The potential of job sharing to save money through increased productivity could see employers as the initiating force behind starting this new type of work arrangement. If and when this occurs, job sharing will become firmly established.

A reason employers have not been more progressive concerning job

sharing may be due to problems associated with the personnel profession. Job sharing requires new methods of determining the optimum number and placement of shared positions. Greater attention to accurate job descriptions is required. The organization will have to reevaluate and improve its methods of performance review, policies concerning promotion and reversibility will have to be developed. In short job sharing makes additional demands on an organization's personnel department and it may be due to this roadblock that sharing has not been approached more vigorously.

There are several major questions that will have to be clarified before job sharing is accepted. What kinds of jobs can be shared? What kinds of employees exist to fill these positions? What is the likelihood of sharing in large organizations with relatively rigid personnel systems? How will unions react to job sharing on a large scale?

Just as flextime looked at the time element in a 'normal' workday so job sharing is looking at jobs that are divided into different divisions of total hours per week. To believe that the normal forty hour work week is unchangable is beginning to sound as ridiculous as the idea that every employee must begin and end work at the same time every day. More and more innovative arrangements are being introduced into the workplace and being proven effective. "The choice, design, implementation and evaluation of alternative work schedules provides personnel practitioners with a real opportunity to demonstrate many of their professional skills. It also provides organizations with a meaningful way to improve the quality of work life."[33] Job sharing is an outgrowth of changes in our society. It is an alternative work option that appears to have a bright future.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Robert W. Bednarzik, "Worksharing in the U. S.: Its Prevalence and Duration" Monthly Labor Review 103 (July 1980), p. 3.

[2]Michael Frease and Robert A. Zawacke, "Job-sharing: An Answer to Productivity Problems?" The Personnel Administrator 24 (October 1979), p. 35.

[3]Barney Olmsted, "Job Sharing-A New Way To Work" Personnel Journal 56 (February 1977), p. 78.

[4]Educational Research Service, Job Sharing: An Alternative to Traditional Employment Patterns (New York: Educational Research Service, 1981), p. 3.

[5]Ibid., p. 3.

[6]Fred Best, Work Sharing-Issues, Policy Options and Prospects (Kalamazoo: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1979), p. 2.

[7]William V. Deutermann and Scott Campbell Brown, "Voluntary Part-time Workers: A Growing Part of the Labor Force" Monthly Labor Review 101 (June 1978), p. 3.

[8]Ibid., p. 3.

[9]Ibid., p. 5.

[10]Ibid., p. 6.

[11]Ibid., p. 6.

[12]Ibid., p. 6.

[13]Ibid., p. 8.

[14]George Ritzer, Working: Conflict and Change, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 398.

[15]These advantages are stated in many sources, please consult the complete bibliography.

[16]These disadvantages are stated in many sources, please consult the complete bibliography.

[17]Educational Research Service, Job Sharing, p. 8.

[18]Ibid., p. 8.

[19]Sar A. Levitan and Richard S. Belous, "Work-sharing Initiatives at Home and Abroad" Monthly Labor Review 100 (September 1977), p. 18.

[20]Bednarzik, "Worksharing in the U. S." , p. 10.

[21]Frease, "Job-sharing: An Answer to Productivity Problems". p. 38.

[22]Gretl S. Meier, Job Sharing-A New Pattern for Quality of Work and Life, (Kalamazoo: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1979), p. 12.

[23]Ibid., p. 12.

[24]Ibid., p. 20.

[25]Fred Best and James Mattesich, "Short-time Compensation Systems in California and Europe" Monthly Labor Review 103 (July 1980), p. 15.

[26]Thomas J. Murray, "Work-Sharing is Working in California" Dun's Review 116 (August 1980). p. 62.

[27]Ibid., p. 27.

[28]Educational Research Service, Job Sharing, p. 16.

[29]Wilma Davidson and Susan Kline, "Job Sharing in Education" The Clearing House 52 (January 1979), p. 227.

[30]Roberta Graham, "In Permanent Part-Time Work, You Can't Beat the Hours" Nation's Business 67 (January 1979), p. 65.

[31]"The Army of the Partly Employed" Forbes 119 (March 1977), p. 58.

[32]Meier, Job Sharing, p. 29.

[33]John W. Newstrom and Jon L. Pierce, "Alternative Work Schedules: The State of the Art" The Personnel Administrator 24 (October 1979), p. 23.

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